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ABSTRACT

Elementary teachers should focus attention on language activities that involve naturally the reciprocal relationships among listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers need to value, use, and make useful the background and language of all students, through a Language Experience Approach (LEA) in which students dictate and write about personal experiences and reconstruct their oral language through reading. Direct teaching of word recognition skills occurs within the framework of personal language and is closely related to writing and spelling activities. A wide variety of language experiences must be provided for students. Listening/viewing centers, writing centers, and reading centers which include student-written books can all stimulate students to produce written language that corresponds with the language arts activities of the classroom. Students can be helped to learn language patterns and vocabulary which may not be characteristic of home-rooted language. Research indicates that LEA appears to have certain distinct advantages for certain pupils. LEA-taught pupils show growth in writing and spelling ability and in the development of a broader informational background. Reading development is at least as great as in basal programs. (GW)

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"Practicing What We Breach -

The Orchestration of the Language Arts".

Paper Presented at the 22nd Annual Convention

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Meeting - Integrating the Language Arts

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"Practicing What We Breach -
The Orchestration of the Language Arts"

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In recent years, increased enphasis has been focused on reading as one integral part of a multifaceted human communication sequence that also includes listening, speaking, and writing. The role of language has slowly acquired a more esteemed position in the "reading program" as communication abilities of all kinds are emphasized.

But most of the contemporary curriculum guides are inclined to state language objectives in terms of listening goals, speaking goals, reading goals, and writing goals. Supervisors and teachers of the language arts are commonly required to take these fragmented goals and arrange them into some cohesive classroom program. This requires teachers to put back together what probably did not need to be separated in the first place.

Allen (1) has suggested that the basic question is not whether we teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but whether we deal directly or indirectly with communication

experiences. If educators deal directly with language as a thought medium, more attention is shifted to self-expression through many media, but expecially through oral and written creative expression. It requires that attention be focused on language activities that involve naturally the reciprocal relationships between listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For too long, the language arts have been taught in a fragmented manner with the hope that students will successfully bring about integration at some future time. But to integrate fragmented learning into personal and meaningful behavior is likely the most difficult of all intellectual operations. If students are actually expected to see the relationships that exist, educators may need to start practicing what is breached, the orchestration of the language arts.

Guiding Principles For Orchestration

If integration is to be realized fully, teachers of the language arts will need to value, use, and make useful the language and backgrounds of all the students. The oral language background of each student will be used throughout the grades. When instruction is begun in reading, a continuing emphasis will be placed on the individual use of language which can be valued, kept through writing, and then reconstructed through reading. The inherent difficulty of

materials is minimized when a student uses personal writing to learn how to recognize words. As the student's language is valued and used, it becomes useful as a knowledge is gained about the similarities and differences of personal language and the language of others. As this knowledge develops, fears of not being able to reproduce the language of others are mitigated.

Direct teaching of the word recognition skills occurs within the framework of personal language, and is closely related to writing and spelling activities in which students deal with the word letter by letter. The personal language of students will have all the necessary ingredients for instruction in reading. Regardless of content, form, or dialect differences, many of the words used by students and by all other authors will be the same. Words of highest frequency will occur naturally as they would in any written material. Reading will be viewed as a process of reconstructing oral language that has been written. Attempts will be made to develop the concept that ideas can be verbalized, written, and verbalized again.

When personal language is emphasized and augmented, students with backgrounds and language that are extremely divergent from the text are not placed at a disadvantage. Students with superior language development will have a greater opportunity in the elementary grades to see their

own speech recorded. Vocabulary control will thus be in the language background of each student. The need seems apparent for fully utilizing children's educational and cultural experiences while developing additional learning experiences to serve as a foundation for advanced language activities.

If students are to be broadly educated, a widening of experiences is a necessity. Language acquisition and language prediction activities must be stressed. Language recognition clues are useless unless the student has developed a language base. To separate symbols from their meaning, and to offer instruction about the symbols without considering the meaning, is a fragmented approach to literacy.

If students are to be expected to read from varying sources, a language storehouse must be developed in the minds of young readers. The use of choral reading, choral speaking, puppetry, box movies, shadow box plays, and stories and poetry read aloud all serve this end. A listening/viewing center can be extablished whereby youngsters can experience language acquisition. This center may contain a projector, filmstrip viewer, record player, language master, and tape recorder. Book/record or book/cassette items, films, filmstrips, studyprints, and puppets are language acquisition components in this center.

Reading educators have been criticized for performing successful phonic operations, but subsequently losing their patients as avid readers. When orchestrating the language

arts, a reading center is a necessity in all classrooms. Books written by other students and bound with contact paper or fabric scraps lead naturally to the understanding that books in this center contain the ideas of various people written on different themes. One might find the following in such a center: multiple copies of different basal readers, on, below and above grade level; magazines and newspapers; paperbacks; trade books; picture books; alphabet books; picture dictionaries; catalogs; reference books; and a wide variety of life-giving literature.

If indeed the language arts are to be orchestrated, the act of producing language in writing that corresponds with the listening, speaking, and reading activities of the classroom is an indispensable component. The writing program must not consist solely of practicing letter formation in the early grades, and doing homework in the upper grades.

A writing center should contain guides that can be used for letter formation, but should consist of abundantly more. Alphabetical charts of highest frequency serve as easy and quick references to spelling. Charts of words that name things, words that describe, and words of motion are an aid to students in creative writing. Charts of words with related and opposite meanings assist in providing colorful language that enables the student to state things in different ways.

In motivating creative writing, a supply of blank books with attractive classroom-bound covers and inviting titles encourage the production of language. These may include: In Our Neighborhood; My Best Trip; or, My Favorite Pets.

Practicing What Is Breached

In order to naturalize, personalize, and humanize language arts instruction, the cultural experiences of the students should be utilized fully. The educational philosopher, John Dewey, stressed continuity and growth as key words in the educational process (5). A student's experiences and home-rooted language are not useful educationally if disregarded by educators.

Using and making useful what the student brings to school through dictation and writing about personal experiences is the doorway of exposure to public language found in books. Literature selections with specific literary patterns are useful for having students repeat language that might not be characteristic of home-rooted language. New vocabularies are acquired through listening and speaking activities that involve singing, repeating chants, listening to the reading of poems and stories, viewing films, and choral reading. All that is learned through listening and speaking may then be used as models for self expression. Games that require

chanting and singing help students practice new ways of saying things atypical of personal language.

After students have had such practice, they are more capable of predicting and recognizing those patterns in print. The language arts teacher should keep available in the listening, reading, and writing centers numerous selections with repeating patterns and dependable lines. This permits the students to read with confidence, and to read in an atmosphere that is comprehension-centered. Students need some practice in reading familiar materials that do not require "sounding out."

Poetry that has repeating lines and patterns is very important in developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills that "connect." Students know what is coming in the poetry and use their recognition skills to confirm their predictions. After students have learned a basic literary structure, they can innovate on the dependable structures by experimenting with substitution of new nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. A language arts teacher must only suggest a strong colorful substitution to ignite a flurry of additional substitutions by the students.

Since there is not time for every student to give oral substitutions, an opportunity arises for students to write sentences, poems, or stories that can be read to each other. Thus, listening and speaking of literary structures such as "The House That Jack Built" paves the way for writing and reading activities that are related. "The House the Jack

Built" in the hands of a student suddenly becomes "The Shack that Jake Made", or "The Bus That the Robbers Kidnapped".

Once students develop the concept that every sentence or phrase can be changed an infinite number of ways to produce original poetry, stories, chants, songs, commercials, etc., an incentive is fostered for students to seek out new patterns that may be deposited in their linguistic storehouses. Students with meager word banks can find their vocabulary taking on new strength as they latch onto structures coming in through the ears.

Some specific ways to orchestrate the Language Arts is by having students dictate or write:

(1) Personal experiences;

(2) Language for a picture book without words;

(3) Language to accompany a book of photographs with personal significance;

(4) Poetry in relation to poetry patterns (Haiku, Cinquain, Senryu, Tanka, Sijo, Renga, etc.);

(5) Transformations of sentences, songs, stories, or entire poems by substituting nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs;

(6) Expansions of sentences, songs, stories, or poems by adding words and phrases to existing structures;

(7) Predictive patterns, stories, or songs in relation to predictable models.

Does It Work?

After decades of verbiage concerning the desirability or undesirability of using this approach, the Language Experience Approach, over other approaches, the literature is replete with admonitions from the opponents and testimonials from the advocates. Burns (3) referred to the lack of repetition of basic vocabulary, temporary value of much of the language, memorization rather than reading, restriction of the content of reading materials to children's experiences, and lack of sequential development of writing skills as basic weaknesses of the Language Experience Approach. Hildreth (8) stated the lack of sequential skill development, the difficulty of classroom management, and lack of emphasis on systematic instruction as problem areas when attempting to orchestrate. Allen (2) offers a rebuttal for all these criticisms when teachers are trained and given specific guides for orchestrating their classrooms.

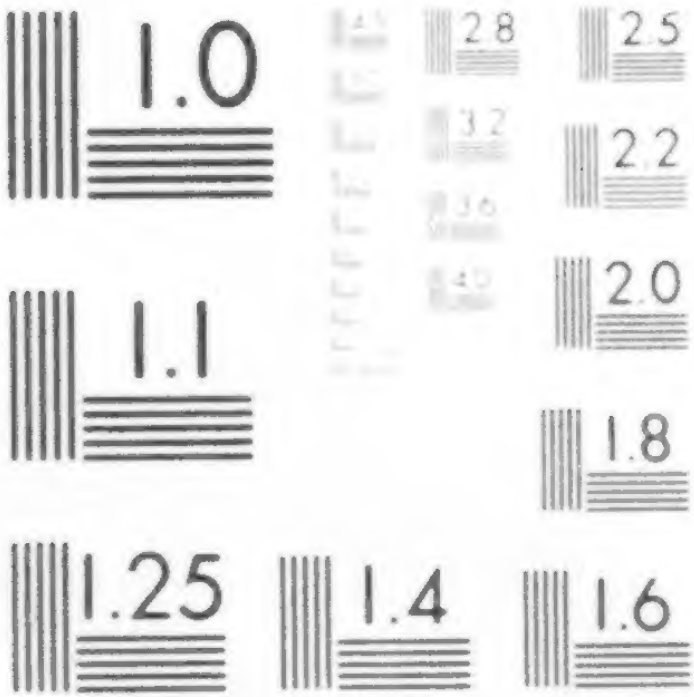
Much interest has been generated about the feasibility of using this creative and personal approach in lieu of the reliable basal material. There have been recent attempts to study empirically the effect upon students of a Language Experience Approach in lieu of a basal series. Stauffer and Hammond (12) conducted a longitudinal study of the LEA versus a basal approach. At the end of first grade, LEA pupils were superior to the basal subjects in word reading, paragraph reading, oral accuracy, three word lists, writing

mechanics, and number of running words in composition. The LEA girls excelled the basal subjects in spelling.

Stauffer and Hammond (13) concocted and refined their own measures for an LEA versus Basal study. Their measures included originality of content, consistency in story sequence, and number of polysyllabic words in the children's writing. After a three-year study the LEA pupils were significantly superior in these measures and in spelling, science, social studies concepts, oral rate and accuracy, word lists, writing mechanics, and number of running and different words.

Kendrick and Bennett (10) reported that low socioeconomic LEA boys, a group that constitutes a major portion of remedial reading classes, were superior to basal pupils in attitude toward reading, while both sexes were superior in the number of words in LEA compositions at the end of the first year. At the end of the second year, all LEA groups and both sexes were superior in the total of words used in speaking. Among the low socioeconomic pupils of both sexes, the LEA subjects were superior on science and social science standardized tests. The low socioeconomic boys trained by the LEA were superior to the basal groups in number of running words, number of different words, and spelling.

Vilscek's (14) LEA pupils were superior in a longitudinal study at the end of first grade to basal pupils in



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
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word reading, paragraph reading, vocabulary, phonics, word lists, and attitude toward reading. At the end of the second year, LEA pupils were superior to basal pupils on tests of spelling, arithmetic concepts, science, and social science (15). Hahn's (6) LEA pupils were also superior in word reading and vocabulary to the matched i.t.a. and basal pupils at the end of one year. At the end of two years, the LEA pupils were superior to the basal pupils on ten of the fourteen standardized tests used, and in number of running words and books read.

Spache (11) summarized these data and concluded that the LEA appeared to have certain distinct advantages for certain pupils. He concluded that pupils taught by this approach are helped to grow in writing ability in the length of their compositions, and in their spelling. He suggested that LEA pupils develop a broader informational background in science and social science by the second or third year of training in such an approach. He stated that development in word reading, paragraph reading, and vocabulary is at least as great as in basal programs.

One study by Cramer (4) reviewed the effects of having children write freely without constant correction. The LEA pupils who were given this freedom were superior to basal pupils on tests of regularly and irregularly spelled words, on number of running words, and number of different

words in their compositions. Hoihjelle (9) suggested that the effect that orchestration has on the classroom climate may explain why teachers like this approach. Harris and Morrison (7) reported that teachers were more permissive, less rigid, and more creative after teaching with the Language Experience Approach.

This writer believes that before we can truly correlate the language arts to any significant degree, important philosophical questions will need addressing. Can we value, use, and make useful what all students bring to our schools? Are these backgrounds of experiences acceptable foundations for subsequent learning? Is home-rooted language acceptable as a beginning point in language arts instruction? Should we eliminate "welfarism" in reading instruction where the teacher is regarded as the "onliest giver of words?" And finally, can we give the advantage to all those who are "disadvantaged" by practicing what we breach - the orchestration of the language arts?

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